Naval War College Review

Volume 53
Number 1 *Winter*

Article 14

2000

Hitler's U-boat War: The Hunters, 1939-1942

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on their perceptions of the situation.

MacGarrigle also addresses the strategic aspects of the conflict. His presentation touches on the political motivations for the war and how those motivations changed with time. While strategy is not MacGarrigle's main thrust, he effectively describes how the conflict looked to General William Westmoreland and his senior military leadership team. MacGarrigle shows how Westmoreland struggled to balance the operational demands of taking the offensive with the political realities of the Vietnamese and the often noncongruent interests of his allies. The relatively short time frame considered here precludes an adequate discussion of the political forces within the United States that influenced and later shaped Westmoreland's ability to carry out his strategy. Anyone wanting a more detailed analysis of the U.S. leadership struggle should read H. R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (HarperCollins 1997—reviewed in the *Naval War College Review*, Spring 1999).

This book describes one long year of a military conflict. Its purpose is to document the U.S. Army's participation, and MacGarrigle does that very well. If there is a criticism, it is the lack of a page or two on the strategic and operational activities of air and naval forces during this time. MacGarrigle recognizes the contributions that airpower (both fixed-wing and helicopter) made to specific operations. Yet a sailor reading this book may wonder in which port the Navy was while the Vietnam War was being fought by the Army.

Notwithstanding, this book is excellent reading for those of us who want to recall what was happening in Vietnam for those twelve months. For those who were not there but wish to understand the political and military forces that were at work, I can highly recommend this volume. Thanks to George L. MacGarrigle for making such an outstanding contribution to the Vietnam literature.

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Blair, Clay. *Hitler's U-boat War: The Hunters, 1939–1942*. New York: Random House, 1996. 809pp. $40

Blair, Clay. *Hitler's U-boat War: The Hunted, 1942–1945*. New York: Random House, 1998. 909pp. $45

The late Clay Blair, author of more than a dozen books, including *Silent Victory: The U.S. Submarine Campaign against Japan* (1975), has produced an encyclopedic, two-volume history of the German submarine campaign during World War II. The first volume covers the "happy time" from August 1939 to August 1942; the second covers the

dénouement of the "gray sharks" from the fall and winter of 1942 down to the bitter end in 1945. Indeed, not since the German scholar Jürgen Rohwer produced his magisterial trilogy (*Chronology of the War at Sea* [1974], *The Critical Convoy Battles of March 1943* [1977], and *Axis Submarine Successes, 1939–1945* [1983]) has any historian labored so long and so hard on this subject. Blair's opus will be the yardstick by which all future accounts of the German U-boats in particular, and of the Battle of the Atlantic in general, will be measured.

The sheer bulk of the work is daunting. There are almost two thousand pages augmented by fourteen maps and thirty-eight appendices (each with its own set of notes). Blair details the sorties of more than a thousand U-boats as well as the Allied convoys against which they sailed, the Allied ships they sunk or were destroyed by, and the ever-increasing interaction between the U-boats and Allied aircraft. The wartime activities of Karl Dönitz's undersea raiders are further subdivided into theaters: the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean, the Americas, the Arctic, and the Mediterranean Sea. The second volume also offers more than forty pages of acknowledgments and sources.

Blair states his purpose clearly and forcefully: to dispel once and for all the widespread "myth," especially in the Anglo-Saxon literature, to the effect that Dönitz's "gray sharks" came within a hair's breadth of defeating the Allies in the Atlantic. Furthermore, he rejects the equally accepted arguments that the Germans built the best submarines of World War II and that the German U-boat "aces" dominated the war at sea. Blair states unequivocally that the German submarine campaign failed and that Dönitz's commanders sank but 1 percent of Allied merchant ships in the transatlantic convoys.

However, Blair is not one-sided in doling out criticism. In the first volume, he roundly castigates Britain for its failure to produce sufficient surface and air escorts or adequate antisubmarine weaponry. Coastal Command remained the "scandalously neglected stepchild" of the Royal Air Force, which concentrated instead on terror attacks against German cities. Nor was London generous in sharing its ENIGMA-breaking secrets with the Americans.

Blair saves his heavy artillery for scholars who have denounced Admiral Ernest J. King and his aides as "fools or knaves or worse" for their reaction—or failure to react—to the first German assault against America, Operation DRUMROLL. Without directly citing Samuel Eliot Morison, Blair suggests that historians have failed to appreciate that the U.S. Navy had to conduct a two-ocean war from the start; that it had to dispatch most of its destroyer force to the Pacific theater; that it paid much greater attention

to the safe delivery of soldiers than has been recognized; and that the famous "destroyer for bases" deal severely limited its escort capabilities. At no time does Blair accept the Anglophile historiography that touts British admirals as "brilliant and infallible warlords."

The second volume continues these themes. Blair argues that Admiral Dönitz's decision to place all his eggs in the wrong basket—the gas-guzzling, crowded, and narrow-beamed Type VII-C boats—came home to roost by the end of 1943. The late introduction neither of the snorkel nor of the vaunted Type XXI electro-boats could turn the tide in the Battle of the Atlantic. Additionally, by repeatedly shifting the center of gravity of the U-boat campaign (from American waters back to the North Atlantic in November–December 1942, then to the air battle over the Bay of Biscay from May to August 1943, then back again into the North Atlantic during the last three months of 1943), Dönitz confused his own commanders and denied his boats an effective single area of operations. The decision to withdraw again from the Atlantic in January 1944 and upgrade his boats brought little relief, and the final so-called "renewed" U-boat offensive of September 1944 to May 1945 (with snorkels and Type XXI craft) did not deter the Allied onslaught against the Reich. Hurriedly prefabricated, propelled by "ruinously underpowered" six-cylinder diesels, and handicapped by complex hydraulic gear located *outside* the pressure hull, the new boats were simply never the "wonder" weapons they are still depicted as having been.

Above all, Blair rightly criticizes Dönitz's failures in the area of electronics. The grand admiral failed to demand microwave search-radar and radar-detector technology for the U-boats. By contrast, Allied centimetric-wavelength radar, especially when installed in four-engine, long-range bombers such as the B-24 Liberator, B-17 Flying Fortress, and the British Halifax, helped turn the tide. Blair's final tally is daunting: Allied aircraft were involved in 324 U-boat kills, and Allied warships accounted for another 282.

My major criticism of the two volumes is that they read all too much like telephone books or parts inventories. In his all-consuming passion to be thorough, Blair almost numbs the reader's mind with detailed accounts of every U-boat that ever sailed, regardless of whether those sorties were critical to the outcome of the Battle of the Atlantic. It takes stamina and sheer determination to wade through the two thousand pages of narrative. Yet the two volumes are, and for a very long time will remain, the standard account in the English language of the German U-boat campaign of World War II. The work constitutes a fitting climax to the career of one of America's foremost experts on submarine warfare in both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans,

and beyond, between 1939 and 1945. No serious scholar can afford to ignore it.

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Clemens, Martin. *Alone on Guadalcanal: A Coastwatcher's Story*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 333pp. $32.95

In February 1942, in the wake of Japan's first bombing raids on Tulagi, Martin Clemens received his first wartime directive. A young British colonial administrator in the Solomon Islands Protectorate, Clemens was dispatched to Guadalcanal as district officer with additional instructions "to act as Intelligence Officer." Implicit in his charter was the defense of his territory. With the Japanese onslaught just days away and no military forces with which to oppose them, "defense" was problematic. Still, Guadalcanal was defended, and the forward momentum of the Japanese Empire was forever broken. This book is the author's story of the remarkable efforts of all the men who, despite tremendous odds, turned the tide of war in the Pacific.

The book begins as the official diary of a colonial administrator, detailing day to day events and transactions of government. With the Japanese attack, however, the diary quickly becomes a chronicle of survival in an increasingly desperate situation. Though not likely intended as such, it is also the story of how one man excelled in managing chaos in what we would today call unconventional and asymmetrical circumstances of exceptional stress and personal risk.

When Clemens arrived on Guadalcanal, the military situation was grim. To face the advancing Japanese he had only a handful of poorly armed native police and a small network of coastwatchers. Yet despite Japanese advances, he was able to build a well organized network of over seventy-five scouts, informers, and coastwatchers by the time the Marines landed in August. That network expanded to over four hundred by December.

Clemens's other duties did not go away with the preparations for battle. Throughout he had the added burden of responsibility for an increasingly nervous population of native islanders, planters, and missionaries. As described in his narrative, his immediate tasks included evacuating nonindigenous civilians, hiding colonial records and silver, feeding the population in the face of an embargo on food imports, expanding his intelligence network, and maintaining order, which included trying to solve a murder. He did all this while nursing a temperamental radio set, foraging for food, and dodging Japanese patrols while maintaining the loyalty and cooperation of an eclectic mix of pagans, Christians, Europeans, and ultimately U.S. Marines.